

## **TESTIMONY OF JOSE SILVA, MD –**

### **Emergency Department Volunteer and retired Lawrence General Hospital Physician**

My name is Jose Silva and I am a retired physician and volunteer at Lawrence General Hospital. I came to Lawrence in 197\_, and was the first Spanish-speaking physician employed by the Lawrence General Hospital to work in the Emergency Department in the early 1970's. I was Chief of Emergency Medicine. I was also the City Physician, and developed the Lawrence General Work Health and Travel Clinics. I now volunteer in the Lawrence General Emergency Department where I tell the staff and patients not to call me DOCTOR Silva any, more. I tell them I don't want to be Dr. Silva, I want to be called Jose. They say no way....(PAUSE).... Dr. Silva.

In the 40 years I worked at Lawrence General, I led many efforts to attract doctors to Lawrence. From my work running the emergency department I saw how badly we needed to have more well-trained physicians working in Lawrence. Doctors who spoke Spanish, were familiar with the culture and who would stay in Lawrence – which was our biggest challenge. Most often, doctors would come, stay as long as their federal loan repayment program required, and leave the community. This created a revolving door effect.

Unfortunately, caring for low income populations and new immigrants is perceived as one of the most difficult career paths for physicians. The pay is modest and the patients needs are complex and require additional training.

Even our status as a Health Professional Shortage Area – designated by the federal government – didn't solve our physician shortage. Physicians burned out easily caring for poor, new immigrants, who were often uninsured and working jobs that made it hard for them to go to follow-up appointments and pay for their medicines.

Through programs like the Foreign Medical Graduate program I created at Lawrence General Hospital, and the Residency Program which the Hospital sponsored financially for many years, we are getting by. But it is a tenuous and constant challenge.

Massachusetts health reform has expanded health coverage, but payments for care to the poor have declined with the economy. This makes the care that Lawrence General Hospital provides to those with health coverage from the major health plans more important than ever before. It helps to subsidize the care and special services we need to care for the underinsured.

I would urge the Attorney General to condition this sale and how Cerberus Capital Management can spend their money. We need every physician, every caregiver, and every access point we have in Lawrence at the Hospital. New York private equity investors will not, I am sure, share our concern for the community. You must demand it. I ask the Attorney General's Office and the Department of Public Health to stand up for the Lawrence community and put conditions in place that protect affordable access to care.

We have made too much progress in Lawrence to let outside investors set us back.

Thank you.